

Hedo Village Walking Route and Sai On Pine Conservation Park

The small village of Hedo, nestled amid subtropical forests, has rich historical connections that belie its compact size. This walking route leads through Sai On Pine Conservation Park, which is home to some Ryukyu pines that are believed to be more than three centuries old. Visitors are encouraged to engage a local guide for a comprehensive experience.

Sai On (1682–1761), a regent and advisor to King Sho Kei during the golden age of the Ryukyu Kingdom, was steeped in the Confucian classics and Chinese works on economics and governance. One of the most influential officials in Okinawan history, he oversaw irrigation and forestry projects across the islands, including the planting of countless pines as a measure against degradation of the forest. These trees became known as the “Sai On pines.”

Sai On’s environmental philosophy balanced conservation with demand for resources, laying the foundations of a new age of prosperity for the Ryukyus. His foresight helped ensure the survival of the Yambaru forest as a carefully tended and thriving ecosystem. Even the US military recognized the value of his policies, commissioning English translations of his writings during the postwar occupation.

The survival of these Sai On pines so far from the capital testifies to the power of the Ryukyu Kingdom at its height and the respect for tradition and history that characterizes Okinawa to this day.